

Making it Work



IDAHO

A Dedicated Program

The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR) has created a new program dedicated to continuously assessing the needs of recreationists and making those needs known to recreation providers so they can be met. The Outdoor Recreation Data Center (ORDC) will create a body of research on changing public values, and it will provide the public and land managers with continuous access to critical information on outdoor recreation in Idaho.

As a recreation planning resource, the Outdoor Recreation Data Center will provide services in three areas: Research, Review and Public Involvement. The following outlines staff positions and duties in each of those areas.

Research

Human Dimensions Analyst—Schooled in statistical analysis, the behavioral sciences and survey instrument design, this position will provide in-house capabilities for developing, implementing and analyzing research on outdoor recreation. The analyst will identify methods and protocols for assessing the social, cultural and economic impacts of outdoor recreation and tourism. Working with the SCORTP Analyst on needs assessments will be a high priority of the research, as will behavioral and attitudinal analysis. As we begin to better understand what people value in their recreational experiences, we will find common ground for issue resolution and pinpoint critical areas of potential conflict over limited resources.

This in-house position will enable IDPR to conduct research much more cost effectively. More important, it will allow the agency to conduct ongoing research, sometimes aimed at segmented recreation (boaters, cross-country skiers, etc.) and sometimes sampling Idaho's general population. ORDC expects to conduct several research projects every year, helping IDPR and other recreation providers to become attuned to public needs. ORDC also plans to begin longitudinal studies that will help planners nationwide better understand the changing needs of recreationists as they move through their life phases.

Review

Outdoor Recreation Analyst (Lands)—The analyst will represent the interests of recreationists in reviewing state and federal proposed actions, ranging from road realignments to Forest Plans. By keeping current on best practices, the analyst will be able to determine how to mitigate disruptions to recreation and recommend actions that will further the goals and objectives identified in SCORTP.

Outdoor Recreation Analyst (Water)—This analyst will represent the interests of recreationists in proposed actions regarding the use of water. They will review streamflow applications, proposed Federal Energy

Regulatory Commission actions and other matters that may have an impact on outdoor recreation. The analyst will serve as IDPR's in-house expert on water and wetland-related issues, paying particular attention to SCORTP identified needs.

Public Involvement

SCORTP Analyst—Dedicated to assisting recreation providers at all levels with planning, this position will communicate the needs of recreationists to providers and the needs of providers to IDPR. The SCORTP Analyst will spend much of their time assessing public need and keeping recreation inventories current to monitor how well IDPR is addressing that need. Paying particular attention to regional needs, the planner will produce an annual scorecard report on progress made toward SCORTP identified goals as well as the required five-year product.

Outdoor Recreation Data Center Coordinator—This is the supervisory position in the new section. In weekly sessions, staff will discuss new proposed actions and other current issues with potential impacts on outdoor recreation. The coordinator will assign research and review tasks and assure that all agency programs are aware of proposed actions that may affect their interests. After compiling staff analysis the coordinator will draft final comments on proposed actions for the IDPR director's signature. This position will also oversee the development and maintenance of the Outdoor Recreation Data Center website, the keystone of the new SCORTP process in Idaho.

Making it Work

In a nutshell, the Outdoor Recreation Data Center will find out what recreationists need through research and public involvement, and assist public agencies in fulfilling those needs. ORDC will give Idahoans a voice in proposed actions affecting their recreation, and offer agencies reliable outdoor recreation data. This integrated, ongoing approach to research and needs assessment as well as planning and review makes sense for Idaho, a state with vast natural resources facing the challenge of one of the fastest growth rates in the nation. We can no longer afford to touch base with the public once every five years or so. In Idaho, SCORTP will become an ongoing process to expand our understanding of recreation needs and resources statewide.

Elements of Implementation

Needs Assessment and Public Involvement

The ORDC approach to needs assessment will be three-fold. First, the center will conduct an annual statewide survey to determine the recreational activities in which Idahoans participate or would like to participate. Second, ORDC will survey recreationists by category to further refine understanding of their needs. For instance, ORDC will conduct an assessment specifically for urban recreation needs, and survey recreationists by activity:

snowmobilers, hikers, mountain bikers, campers, etc. Third, ORDC will take research results and conduct a series of annual recreation forums where staff can speak informally with local recreationists about their needs. While these will not result in quantifiable data, they will give staff a sense of recreation needs geographically, alert ORDC to emerging issues/activities and help IDPR better understand how well its efforts are meeting needs.

At the recreation forums the public will see presentations and static displays on what recreation providers at all levels are planning for their region in the coming year. They will also have the opportunity to comment in a formal way, using needs assessment survey data as a starting point, and talk with recreation staff informally in order to make their needs known.

The Idaho ORDC website will complement the recreation forums by serving as a statewide focal point for public information and comment. The site will include links to current proposed actions by type and geographical area to make it easier to provide feedback on outdoor recreation issues. It will also include a centralized method for the public to provide comments about recreation issues, facilities and services regardless of the managing provider.

Recreation Provider Assessments

Going hand in glove with the public needs assessment, the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation will query recreation providers at all levels annually to keep abreast of changing recreation patterns and to uncover developing issues. The assessments will include at least one annual meeting of major providers followed by a mail-out and web-based survey of all identified providers in the state. After identifying needs, issues and opportunities, the providers will be asked to rank them. A compilation of that data will help ORDC identify its annual planning focus.

Recreation Inventory

ORDC has created a database of recreation opportunities in Idaho. Over the coming months, that database will be refined by working with providers such as the Forest Service, BLM, US Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Idaho Department of Lands, Idaho Fish and Game Department, county and city governments and school districts. The database will track not just inventory, but the condition of recreation facilities and the need for additional facilities.

Measurement

The Idaho SCORTP Task Force will meet at least quarterly to assess progress and compile narratives on projects that work toward SCORTP goals or objectives. As each calendar year draws to a close, the compiled narratives will be reported on the ORDC website alongside a scorecard representing percentage of goal or objective completion. In addition, the information will be contained in an annual SCORTP report available in a printed format. At the end of every five-year period, the annual report will include all elements required in a SCORTP document, which will signal the start of the next planning period.